

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RABAT 06158 191736Z

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7251

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 6158

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT MO

SUBJECT: PROMINENT OPPOSITION FIGURE ASSASSINATED

1. OMAR BENJELLOUN, LEADING MEMBER OF SOCIALIST UNION OF POPULAR FORCES (USFP) AND EDITOR OF PARTY ORGAN AL MOUHARIR, WAS MURDERED IN CASABLANCA AFTERNOON OF DEC 18. ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL PRESS AGENCY MAP, BENJELLOUN BEATEN TO DEATH WITH IRON BAR AS HE LEFT HIS HOME BY ONE SAAD MOHAMED, SHOEMAKER, WHO IMMEDIATELY ARRESTED. MOTIVE NOT YET KNOWN, MAP REPORTED, AND INVESTIGATION BEING ACTIVELY PURSUED.

2. BENJELLOUN HAD IMPECCABLE CREDENTIALS AS OPPOSITION MILITANT, ALTHOUGH HE REPUTED TO HAVE MELLOWED RECENTLY. HE WAS JAILED FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM DURING PERIODS 1963-65 AND 1966-67. IN JAN. 1973 HE WAS TARGET OF UNSUCCESSFUL LETTER BOMB ATTEMPT, PERPETRATORS OF WHICH REMAINED UNIDENTIFIED. JAILED AGAIN FOLLOWING MARCH 1973 DISORDERS, HE WAS LAST RELEASED
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PAGE 02 RABAT 06158 191736Z

SEPT. 1974. THEREAFTER, BENJELLOUN CONTINUED TO BE CRITICAL

OF MOST REGIME POLICIES BUT WAS STALWART SUPPORTER OF GOM'S EFFORT TO ANNEX WESTERN SAHARA, ALTHOUGH USFP LEADERSHIP WAS CONSPICUOUS BY ITS ABSENCE FROM RECENT SAHARA MARCH. HIS SAHARA POSITION, AND PARTICULARLY HIS REMARKS IN A NOVEMBER DEBATE WITH SPANISH AND ALGERIAN ADVOCATES IN PARIS, NETTED HIM LABEL OF "BOOTLICKER" AND PHONEY OPPOSITIONIST FROM ALGERIAN MEDIA.

3. COVERAGE OF THE MURDER THUS FAR STRAIGHTFORWARD IN BOTH SEMI-OFFICIAL AND OPPOSITION PRESS, WITH NO HINT YET THAT ACT WILL BE TURNED INTO POLITICAL ISSUE BY EITHER SIDE. IN ITS MORE DETAILED REPORT, AL MOUHARIR SAID ASSASSIN USED A KNIFE AND HAD TWO POSSIBLE ACCOMPLICES WITH HIM WHO WERE OBSERVED FLEEING THE AREA. PAPER REMARKED THAT SAAD MOHAMED WAS "OF SOUND MIND" AND "TRAINED" FOR SUCH A CRIME. STORY THUS TENDED TO DISMISS LUNACY AS MOTIVE AND SUGGESTED PREMEDITATION WITHOUT GOING SO FAR AS TO MAKE ACCUSATIONS. MOST BUT NOT ALL OBSERVERS MEANWHILE DISMISS IDEA OF CLANDESTINE INVOLVEMENT BY SECURITY APPARATUS ON GROUNDS THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN JUDGED SENSELESS AND DANGEROUS AT THIS POINT. SOME SEE POSSIBILITY OF ALGERIAN HAND IN THE AFFAIR BECAUSE OF BENJELLOUN'S SUPPORT OF GOM'S SAHARA POLICY AND OUTSPOKEN CRITICISM OF ALGERIAN POSITION.

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